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Message Text

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61
ACTION ARA-20

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00

NSC-10 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03 SS-20 USIA-15

ACDA-19 IO-14 AID-20 OMB-01 PC-04 EB-11 COME-00

TRSE-00 INT-08 SCEM-02 OPIC-12 CIEP-02 DRC-01 /192 W
---------- 014997
R 181434Z OCT 73
FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1522
INFO AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
AMEMBASSY PORT OF SPAIN
AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN
DIA WASHDC
USCINCSO CZ
AMEMBASSY BRAZILIA

C O N F I D E N T I A L CARACAS 8948

USCINCSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, VE
SUBJECT: ELECTION OVERVIEW AT EIGHT WEEKS FROM ELECTION DAY

REF: CARACAS A-400

1. WITH LESS THAN 8 WEEKS LEFT BEFORE THE DECEMBER 9 NATIONAL ELECTIONS THE ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN, WHICH BEGAN ABOUT 20 MONGHS AGO, IS MOVING INTO ITS FINAL STAGES IN AN ORDERLAY AND PEACEFUL MANNER IN FACT, DSPITE GREAT AMOUNTS OF CAMPAIGN HOOPLA, THE LACK OF MANY WELL-DEFINED SUBSTANTIVE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE TWO MAJOR PARTIES HAS INTRODUCED A DEGREE OF ENNUI AMONG THE ELECTORATE. ALL LOCAL OBSERVERS AGREE THAT, OF THE 14 CANDIDATES IN THE RACE, ONLY EITHER THE RULING COPEI PARTY'S LORENZO FERNANDEZ OR ACCION DEMOCRATICA'S CARLOS ANDRES PEREZ WILL WIN, BARRING SOME CATASTROPHIC UNFORESEEN CIRCUMSTANCE (E.G. DEATH OR INCAPACITY OF
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ONE OF THESE TWO CANDIDATES). MOST IMPARTIAL LOCAL OBSERVERS

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ALSO AGREE THAT THE RACE IS STILL NECK-AND-NECK BETWEEN FERNANDEZ AND PEREZ, WITH NEITHER POSSESSING A CLEAR-CUT ADVANTAGE AT THIS TIME. IT IS WIDELY ASSUMED AMONG VENEZUELANS THAT MAS WILL COME IN THIRD, WITH THE NEW FORCE FOURTH (ALTHOUGH SOME PROFESS TO DISBELIEVE THE POLLS AND INSIST THAT THE LATTER WILL FINISH AHEAD OF THE FORMER).

2. WITH EITHER COPEI OR AD VIRTUALLY CERTAIN TO WIN THE PRESIDENCY, THE COMPOSITION OF THE NEXT NATIONAL CONGRESS REMAINS THE SAMPAIGN'S PRINCIPAL UNCERTAINTY. MANY OBSERVERS FEAR A FRAGMENTATION OF POLITICAL POWER IN THE NEW CONGRESS, WITH NO PARTY RECEIVING MORE THAN 20 PCT OF THE SEATS. (VENEZUELA'S PROPORTIONAL REPRESENT-ATION ELECTORAL SYSTEM DELIBERATELY FAVORS SMALL-PARTY REPRESENT-ATION, AND THIS IS THE PRIME CONSIDERATION OF THE MULTITUDE OF SMALL PARTIES REMAINING IN THE RACE). MANY OTHER OBSERVERS, HOW-EVER PROFESS TO DISCERN A TREND TOWARD THE TWO MAJOR PARTIES IN THE CONGRESSIONAL RACES ("POLARIZATION," IN LOCAL PARLANCE) AND FORESEE COPEI AND AD RECEIVING 50-60 PCT OF THE CONGRESSIONAL VOTE. AT THIS POINT THE EMBASSY IS INCLINED TO THINK THAT COPEI AND AD COULD EXPAND SOMEWHAT THEIR REPRESENTATION IN CONGRESS-BUT BY HOW MUCH THE EMBASSY CANNOT FORETELL AT THIS TIME.

3. AS THE ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN PROCEEDS THERE IS EVIDENCE OF INCREASING VENEZUELAN CONFIDENCE AND PRIDE IN THE DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM, AND DETERMINATION TO CONTINUE TO MAKE IT WORK. ON OCTOBER 14 DEFENSE MINISTER PARDI DAVILA REITERATED THAT THE ARMED FORCES WILL GUARANTEE THE PEOPLE'S WILL AS EXPRESSED AT THE POLLS, THE MAJOR POLITICAL PARTIES HAVE PLEDGED TO ABIDE BY THE OUTCOME OF THE ELECTIONS, AND THE COUNTRY'S ELECTORAL MACHINERY SEEMS TO BE FUNCTIONING FAIRLY AND SMOOTHLY. AT THE SAME TIME, THERE APPEARS LITTLE DANGER THAT THE ELCTORAL PROCESS CAN BE FRUSTATED BY EXTREMISTS OF EITHER THE FAR LEFT OR RIGHT.

4. COMMENT: FROM THE STANDPOINT OF THE U.S. INTEREST, THE VENEZUELAN ELECTION CAMPAIGN IS PROCEEDING WELL. THE EMBASSY HAS MADE A GREAT EFFORT TO DISSIPATE ANY LINGERING SUSPICION OF THE U.S. GOVERNMENT PARTISAN BIAS IN THE CONTEST AND IS MAINTAINING A LOW PROFILE FOR THE U.S. AS THE CAMPAIGN RUNS ITS COURSE. NO ANTI-AMERICAN ISSUE HAS ARISEN BETWEEN THE TWO MAJOR PARTIES, AND THUS FAR PETROLEUM HAS NOT BEEN AN ISSUE OF INTENSE PARTISAN DEBATE
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IN THE CAMPAIGN. SINCE THE U.S. GOVERNMENT WILL BE ABLE TO LIVE WITH EITHER THE COPEYANO OR ADECO WINNER (WHO SOONER OR LATER WILL LIKELY WORK OUT SOME SORT ARRANGEMENT WITH ANOTHER PARTY AND PERHAPS SOME MINOR PARTIES) TO CONTROL THE CONGRESS, AS HAS BEEN THE CASE UP TO NOW, OUR PRIME INTEREST IN THIS DRAWN-OUT ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN SO FAR CENTERS LESS IN ITS PROBABLE OUTCOME THAN IN THE FACT THAT, AT THIS WRITING, IT BIDS FAIR TO REAFFIRM AND STRENGTHEN THE NOT-SO-LONG-AGO PRECARIOUS DEMOCRATIC TRADITIONS OF THIS OIL-

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RICH COUNTRY WHICH IS INCREASINGLY IMPORTANT TO THE UNITED STATES.
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